

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-14

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DRAFTED BY ARA/AND/C:DWCOX:CMM

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TO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA IMMEDIATE

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

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GENEVA FOR MATHEA FALCO

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1

TAGS: SNAR, CO

SUBJECT: LEAK OF NARCOTICS INFORMATION

REFERENCE: (A) BOGOTA 1493 (B) BOGOTA 1387

(C) BOGOTA 1538

1. DEPARTMENT VERY MUCH APPRECIATES AND CONCURS WITH APPROACH TAKEN BY AMBASSADOR WITH PRESIDENT LOPEZ AND BY DCM WITH VICE ADMIRAL MELENDEZ ON THIS DELICATE ISSUE. OUR HOPE IS THAT WE CAN CONTINUE TO MINIMIZE MEDIA STORIES WHICH FEATURE A USG ROLE, PARTICULARLY BEFORE THE FEBRUARY 26 QUOTE PRIMARY UNQUOTE BETWEEN LLERAS AND TURBAY AND DURING THE REST OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. DEPARTMENT REALIZES THIS WILL BE DIFFICULT IF MORE LEAKS

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ARE FORTHCOMING OR LOPEZ GOES PUBLIC WITH HIS AIDE MEMOIRE.

2. THOUGH RECOGNIZING THE RISKS OF THE AMBASSADOR'S SEEING DEFENSE MINISTER VARON WHILE PRESS INTEREST IS STILL ACTIVE, DEPARTMENT BELIEVES THAT ON BALANCE IT IS BEST TO GO AHEAD WITH THE MEETING AND MAKE A STRONG PITCH FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE ROLE FOR THE ARMED FORCES IN NARCOTICS

INTERDICTION. IF VARON PRESSES FOR HIS OWN EXONERATION OF ANY CONNECTION WITH NARCOTICS TRAFFICKING, DEPARTMENT BELIEVES AMBASSADOR SHOULD TAKE GENERAL LINE TAKEN BY DCM

WITH MELENDEZ (PARA FIVE, REFTEL B), THOUGH AMBASSADOR WILL OBVIOUSLY HAVE TO BE GUIDED BY HIS OWN BEST JUDGMENT ON HOW TO HANDLE THE ISSUE ON THE SPOT. CLEARLY THE AMBASSADOR CANNOT DENY INFORMATION WHICH HE BELIEVES TO BE TRUE, ALTHOUGH LEGITIMATE CAVEATS ON THE RELIABILITY OF ANY INFORMATION CAN CERTAINLY BE STATED.

3. DEPARTMENT LOOKS FORWARD TO RECEIVING THE EMBASSY'S PROPOSED POINT-BY-POINT REPLY TO THE AIDE MEMOIRE, WHICH OF COURSE WOULD NEED HIGH-LEVEL WASHINGTON CLEARANCES BEFORE DELIVERY TO THE GOC OR USE FOR PUBLIC DISSEMINATION. VANCE

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